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Minister facing quiz on Bonn spy scandal

FROM COMBINED DISPATCHES

BONN, West Germany — A man who defected with his wife to Communist East Germany was required by his job to have contacts with Soviet Embassy officials, the research foundation for which he worked said yesterday.

The opposition Social Democrats (SPD) announced they were calling Interior Minister Friedrich Zimmermann before a parliamentary commission today to answer allegations he has mishandled the current spy scandal, which began on Aug. 6 with the defection of a long-time aide to Economics Minister Martin Bangemann.

Since then, seven suspected spies either have fled to East Germany or have been arrested.

In the latest incident, Herbert Willner and his wife, Herta-Astrid, who worked as a secretary in Chancellor Helmut Kohl's office, failed to return home from a vacation in Spain last month.

Bonn officials said Tuesday they had fled to East Germany, and said they are suspected of spying for that country.

Mr. Willner worked as a foreign policy and security expert for the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, a research group closely allied with the Free Democratic Party, the junior partner in Mr. Kohl's coalition government. Mr. Willner previously had worked for the FDP.

Because Mr. Willner reported his contacts with foreign embassy personnel, the FDP and the Naumann Foundation

did not find the actions suspicious, said the conservative Die Welt newspaper, which has close government contacts.

(But George Carver, senior fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies told The Washington Times that the Naumann Foundation statements are "true, but irrelevant and disingenuous." Herbert Willner's social contacts with Soviet Embassy officials are beside the point, said Mr. Carver, because he has exposed himself as an East German spy. "The Free Democratic Party is trying to wipe egg off its face," he contended.)

Chief Federal Prosecutor Kurt Rebmann said Mr. Willner, a Waffen SS veteran, was a member of East Germany's Communist Party before moving to West Germany in 1961. After relocating to West Germany he worked as a journalist for the magazine Der Spiegel.

Interior Ministry officials say the country's counter-espionage agency had suspected Mr. Willner, 59, of being an East German spy for 12 years and requested permission to place the couple under extra surveillance.

The Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the country's counter-spy agency, had asked the Interior Ministry on May 17 for permission to tap their telephone and read their mail, said ministry spokesman Hans Neusel.

But Mr. Neusel said Mr. Kohl, a Christian Democrat, and the Interior Ministry decided last month there was

not enough evidence to justify such steps.

Mrs. Willner's defection is the first time a spy case has hit the chancellor's office since former Chancellor Willy Brandt's top aide, Gunter Guillaume, was exposed as an East German agent in 1974.

Mr. Zimmermann was expected to face stiff questioning by the Social Democrats for his handling of the spy affair at Friday's closed-door meeting of the Parliamentary Central Commission, an eight-member group that reviews the country's three intelligence agencies.

The Social Democrats claim Mr. Zimmermann ignored clear signs of spy activity. His ministry is responsible for numerous security and counter-espionage functions.

"There are two elements at work in the attempt to discredit Zimmermann," said Mr. Carver. "The FDP is a swing party for coalition governments. The pound of flesh it has traditionally extracted for its support has been the foreign ministry, the economics ministry and the interior ministry. But, in the last election, the FDP didn't do very well and no longer had the clout to demand three major portfolios. Zimmermann is not their man. He's CSU [Christian Social Union], hand-picked by Franz-Josef Strauss. The FDP is trying to get back what they feel is rightfully theirs."

(The Social Democrats are trying to draw a parallel between the current scan-

dal and the 1974 Brandt affair, but the two cases are not at all similar, said Mr. Carver. Gunter Guillaume was Willy Brandt's personal aide, and Mr. Brandt rallied behind him, but Mrs. Willner had a minor clerical position in the chancellor's office, he said.)

In East Berlin yesterday, Willy Brandt and East German leader Erich Honecker said their countries had a special role to play in preserving peace in Europe.

Mr. Brandt, in his first visit since 1974, said both countries should develop their own initiatives and press for disarmament. SPD sources said Mr. Honecker echoed the sentiments in over four hours of talks.

"The threat to peace no longer originates in the center of Europe. Today's worries are not German but European and global," Mr. Brandt said.

"Both states, loyal to their alliances, which will exist for the foreseeable future, should see a common duty. They should use chances presented by their proximity [to each other] and make a contribution to replacing the present fruitless confrontation ... By a partnership of security."

The Albert Einstein Peace Prize Foundation announced yesterday that Mr. Brandt has won the 1985 Einstein Peace Prize.

Mr. Brandt received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1971.

Lou Marano contributed to this report in Washington.